

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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ALEXIA.

BY ELEANOR C. PRICE,

Author of "Gerald."

CHAPTER II.

As the Squire made his way towards Alexia's corner he stumbled a little among the furniture, for the room was dark, and there were a great many small tables and chairs in it.

"I'm very sorry—I can't see," he said, when he reached her at last. By this time she was standing up in front of the fire. "You are downstairs again; I am so glad. Do you feel all right, really?"

Alexia told him she was perfectly well. She took her little hand out of his, for he did not seem inclined to let it go. He stood looking down into her face—not at all confused or ashamed of himself—with a gaze that would have startled Miss Radcliffe. A feeling of warmth and happiness stole over Alexia, while Charlie, on the contrary, felt suddenly snubbed and cold. For she did not seem at all glad to see him; she turned away, and sat down on her sofa, where the heaps of rugs and cushions quite forbade any idea of room for him; and, after standing foolishly on the hearthrug for a minute, silenced, he did not know how, he meekly took the small chair that Mrs. Dodd had despised, and, leaning forward, stared into the fire for a few seconds, before he dared look at Alexia again.

"That was a horrid accident," he said. "I'm awfully glad you have got over it so well. I don't know when I've been so frightened. Lil made a great fool of herself, and I hope you don't mean to ride her again."

"Oh, certainly I do," said Alexia. "She will break her heart if I don't. I only

hope I shall not spoil another day's hunting for you."

Mr. Melville did not answer for a moment. Then he said gravely:

"You think it was spoilt, do you?"

"It was spoilt for me," said Alexia heartlessly. "One of the best runs we have had this winter. Oh, how cross and miserable I have been all this time!"

"But I suppose you have had lots of people to see you? Tea parties without end, in spite of the doctor?" suggested Charlie.

"Mrs. Dodd—a host in herself," said Alexia, and they both laughed.

Then they went on talking about the accident, and about hunting, and the skating since Christmas; and Charlie told her what he had been doing every day. He tried a little to make out that everything had been spoilt by her absence; but this was made a hard task by the sort of cool, friendly indifference that she chose to keep up towards him.

It was a pale, cheerful little face that the firelight flickered upon. She grumbled, but in a philosophic way, with a background of hard content. Charlie might look; she felt his eyes upon her, with a strange depth in them quite absent from his words. She would not look at him, and Charlie was aware of this, in spite of his simplicity, and found a little encouragement in it. Alexia frightened him, however; he wondered what was the matter. He felt rather injured, and would have liked to ask straight out what he had done to offend her. But how could one begin to bully a shadow like that? If she would only have been soft, and gentle, and sentimental, as an invalid ought to be, Charlie could have done what he longed to do—could have comforted her, could have told her something which he had once thought she

would care to hear ; but now he really was not sure.

It was very odd, he thought ; in all the years he had known Alexia she had never been so hard, so ungracious, had never received him so coldly. She evidently meant to show him that his visit was no particular pleasure to her. And if she could have guessed the feelings with which he came up to the door just now !

"Mrs. Dodd has been here this afternoon, and was very amusing," said Alexia. "She has been telling me all about the ball."

"Oh—that beastly ball !" muttered Charlie after a moment.

"What !" said Alexia, lifting her eyebrows with an air of surprise. "Mrs. Dodd did not think so ; and she did not think that you thought so. She said it was delightful, and splendid, and altogether nice, and that you——"

"What did Mrs. Dodd say about me ?" interrupted Charlie. "Come now, a woman like that, always preaching, she had no business to be there at all. She only came for gossip and mischief, and you must not believe anything she said about me."

"It was nothing bad," Alexia went on calmly. "She said you danced all night, and seemed to be enjoying yourself immensely. Why shouldn't I believe that ? I am quite sure it was true."

"Did she say nothing but that ? Look here, one may dance a great deal, and talk a great deal, and be wishing one's self out of it all the time. I tell you the ball was beastly, and I was awfully glad when the people went away. Didn't you know I should feel like that, Alexia—tell me ?"

"I really can't see into other people's minds. I know I should have enjoyed it," said Alexia, with a little fatigue in her voice.

She hardly knew what she was saying ; but as Charlie talked the old conviction came back of her power over him. She knew she might be happy if she liked ; yet she was half afraid, half sad, and she thought that everything had better float on uncertainly a little longer. She looked at him as he sat there, stooping forward, playing with his stick ; at that moment he was looking at the fire, and his fair bright head and honest face were in the full light of it. He was so unusually grave and thoughtful that she felt rather nervous, and went on talking hurriedly.

"And are you going to some more balls ?"

she said. "Didn't you say something about going away ?"

"Yes ; to Lincolnshire. Skating, and three balls, I believe. I'm going tomorrow, unfortunately. I wish I could get out of it."

"How can you be so lazy !" said Alexia. "People like you are luckier than anyone, and more ungrateful. I wish I had the chance of flying off somewhere for skating and three balls."

"You wouldn't like it if you were me," said Charlie.

"Indeed I should," laughed Alexia.

"Well—for some things it's rather good, because I had a row with my mother this morning, and the house won't be comfortable till that has blown over. I wouldn't go for any other reason ; but I believe it's wise. One must think of the future. She will have time to come to her senses and understand that I am not—that after all she can't twist me round her little finger and make me do as she likes."

"She is sure to want you to do what is right," said Alexia.

"No," said Charlie positively. "She wants me to do what's wrong. You see you don't know what you're talking about, Alexia."

"Very true ; but I am safe in standing by Mrs. Melville."

"If you knew what you are saying"—said Charlie. And with a sudden, startling resolution he got up, and leaning on the back of his chair, bent down towards Alexia. "Do you know," he began, in a quick, low voice, while she shrank back into her corner ; but then he was interrupted, and all was over.

Mr. Page slowly turned the handle of the door and walked into the room. He saw Charlie Melville standing with his back to the fire, holding his hat and stick, his visit evidently just at an end. His manner was a little flurried, but Mr. Page did not notice that. Alexia was flushed ; no wonder, so near such a blazing fire.

It appeared that the Squire was just going away. He could not stay any longer. He took leave of Alexia with a murmur of "shall see you when I come back," and Mr. Page went out of the room with him. After he was gone, Alexia looked at her hand for a moment, and then, with a sudden foolishness, kissed it. Then she drew back the heavy curtain that shaded the end of her sofa, and, hidden herself among the shadows, looked with wistful eyes after Charlie as he walked towards the

gate. He did not turn or look back; but her father was with him, and they seemed to be talking very earnestly. Her father walked on with him, the gate clicked; they were lost to sight now behind the ivy wall, and presently Alexia crept back to her corner and coiled herself up there again, thinking, and wondering, and wishing. It was impossible, it was unnatural, it could not be that Charlie could think of her as she thought of him. The difference was too great; something in Charlie was always reminding her of that, with all his simpleness. And yet, what did he mean just now?

As she lay crouched there half dreaming, with the weight of the next few days upon her weary little soul, her father startled her by coming in rather suddenly. He poked the fire with a good deal of violence, and then stood rubbing his hands, looking at her with a curious, excited expression. She pressed her face into the cushion, and wished he would go away.

"Alex, are you awake?" he said; and she answered rather crossly, feeling as if she could not bear ordinary talk just then. "Look here, my dear, I don't think this will do, you know," said William Page.

"What?" asked Alexia, groaning.

"Young Melville says you know all about it, though he had not time to say much this afternoon. I came in at the wrong moment, it seems. But he was determined, at least, to have it out with me."

"Father, what are you talking about?" said Alexia, sitting up and smoothing back her hair. "What has he been saying to you?"

"Of course," said Mr. Page, gravely, "I always knew that you and he were great allies; but I did not know that things had come to that pitch, quite. Alex, look here. He says that you promised to marry him years ago."

"Oh, that was nothing," said Alexia, colouring crimson. "That was—oh, yes, years ago, when we were almost children, and he was nobody. I don't know what he means—why he should mention that at all."

"Exactly—I told him that was no engagement. People are not bound by childish promises like that. He understood; he couldn't say they were. But he wants to have it all renewed now. How do you feel about it?" said Mr. Page, rather vaguely. He was a shy man, and this seemed a very awkward subject, even

with his daughter. It also struck him as one of the most serious things he had ever had to say to her; and so no doubt it was. He was afraid that Alexia might take the decided line of telling him that he had no right to interfere. He thought he had a right: he could not bear to cross the child or make her unhappy; but he saw great obstacles in the way of Charles Melville's wish. In fact, with an old-fashioned feudal loyalty in his mind, he did not think his daughter good enough for the Squire; but he could not exactly tell her that, being gentle and considerate always.

For several moments Alexia did not answer him. She was, perhaps, too happy to speak; yet she could not realise her happiness, which already seemed to have something terrible in it. "No, it is impossible," that voice kept on saying in the depths of her heart. She could not be at peace, as another girl might have been, in the knowledge that her love was her own love after all, no matter how many times he danced with Miss Radcliffe.

"He means it?" she said at last, half under her breath.

"Certainly," said her father. "He would hardly have said it to me if he did not mean it. And he seemed to have a sort of assurance that your ideas were the same as his. Perhaps it is not fair for me to ask you questions."

"I don't see any good in it, father," said Alexia after another pause.

"I should be very well satisfied if you could tell me that you don't care for the fellow," said Mr. Page; but his daughter made no response to this, and presently he went on: "it seems a queer view for me to take of it perhaps. But the thing, as it strikes me, is an awkward thing, Alex; not very good for you and bad for him. Of course you don't agree with me"—as she made some little murmur. "As far as character goes you might suit each other well enough. I am looking at it from a worldly point of view—thinking of his interests and the family opinion, and so forth."

"And you are not ambitious," said Alexia, with her face half buried in the cushion.

"No, I am not. Are you?" said her father more sharply. "Would you like to enter a family and be looked down upon by them and their friends? Charlie himself would always be good to you—I have no doubt about that—but there are his mother and a dozen other women to be

considered. Could you hold up your head amongst them, Alex?"

"I should hate them all, no doubt," said Alexia. "But I should not be afraid of them if——"

"Ah, very likely!" said William Page. "That is not real happiness, though. But—putting your feelings out of the question, my dear, for a moment—such a clear-headed young woman might be able to see that by marrying Charlie Melville she would be doing him an injury."

His first nervousness had quite left him now. He stood looking down at the floor; looking at Alexia was no use, for she had turned her face away from him. His quiet attitude, his smooth grey hair, and pale clear-cut face, all had somehow an air of calm determination. Very gentle, very matter-of-fact, seeing his own duty and Alexia's with a certain positiveness,—and yet behind all this there was considerable doubt of having his own way. Alexia had been too much for him in most of the affairs of life; she had ruled him and his house for many years now. It was true, they generally agreed in their views of things,—but now, if Alexia had set her heart on this?

"Father," said Alexia, interrupting his thoughts. She spoke with difficulty, for it seemed rather horrible to talk like this, when Charlie himself had not said a word to her. "Tell me what you mean," she said. "How could I?"

"The Melvilles' affairs are in a very bad way," said Mr. Page. "I was talking to old Morton the other day, and he gave me a frightful account of the sums of money George ran through. One would hardly have believed that a fellow could do so much mischief in so short a life. He said Charles would have to live prudently for years, might have to mortgage the estate very likely—George's debts are not half paid yet. He said Charlie must not marry at all, or else he must marry money. And that was what he seemed to think likely, from something Mrs. Melville had said to him. These times too—rents unpaid, land losing its value—he could better afford to make a fool of himself, if he was a sub in a marching regiment. It was a pity, by-the-by, that he left the navy—something at least to fall back upon."

"You pay your rent," said Alexia.

"Yes, and it is as much as I can do. There is no money to throw away as there was in old times."

Alexia was silent; she had nothing to

say. Only she wondered and longed to know what Mrs. Melville had really said to Mr. Morton, the old lawyer, who knew all the family affairs. Was it Miss Radcliffe's money that they meant Charlie to marry? Alexia was by no means a foolish girl, but she argued with herself that there was a right and a wrong in this matter, and that it would be supremely wrong if Charlie and she, who cared for each other, were to be separated because of money. If he had to live prudently—well, why should he not? Must one be extravagant in order to be happy?

Mr. Page did not say much more, for he saw with regret that Alexia differed from him. He felt a little angry, but he could not be harsh with her. It was not the marriage that he would have chosen for her. With all his attachment to the Melvilles, he did not respect them; he thought they had no strength of character. In many ways, he told himself, Alex was too good for the young fellow. But he supposed that if Charlie was in earnest Alexia would be obstinate, and so there would be nothing more for him to say. Perhaps his chief feeling on the subject was a very strong disinclination to meet Mrs. Melville.

CHRONICLES OF SCOTTISH COUNTIES.

THE BORDER COUNTIES. PART III.

THE little county of Selkirk, with its bare sheep pastures and bold hills, has changed in character altogether in the course of centuries, and only here and there an ancient thorn-bush or clump of birches remains to recall its fame as the once forest, the Ettrick Forest of song and legend.

The scenes are desert now and bare
Where flourished once a forest fair.

And although much has been done in the way of covering the hillsides with artificial plantations, yet are the sheep pastures still paramount; although it is said that the forest, though subdued, is not and never will be extirpated, and that were the sheep removed and the country left to itself all the slopes would be soon covered with a thick underwood, and forest trees would push their slow growth till the scene would be once more as of old when the outlaw Murray ruled over the greenwood and when the Border minstrel could sing—

Etricke foreste is a feir foreste;
In it grows manie a semelie tree.
There's hart and hinde, and doe and roe,
And of a' wilde beastes grete plentie.

The first clearance of the forest and the beginning of its reduction into sheep-walks was effected by James the Fifth—the goodman of Ballengiech—who, with the design of turning the nominal rights of the Crown over the waste lands of these regions to good profit, descended in strong force upon the Borders, in the guise of a great hunting expedition, and, taking the Border chiefs in detail, carried death and destruction among them. One of his first blows was delivered against the outlaw Murray—

I see either be king of Etrike foreste,
Or king of Scotland that Outlaw sall be.

At this great crisis of the fate of the Borderers the great chiefs of the clans were conspicuously absent. The King had shut them up in one fortress or another, and his Lowland lords and their followers, who had often suffered at the hands of the raiders, made short work of the smaller lairds and chiefs. Murray was hanged from one of the forest trees, and Adam Scott, the King of the Borders as he was called—a potentate whom the great novelist was proud to own as one of his forbears—was hanged also in front of his own tower of Tushielaw. The old elm which formed the gallows was still to be seen, its sturdy projecting limb still scored with the marks of the ropes of various executions, for it had been a favourite tree of Adam Scott himself, who, if family pride does not exaggerate the case, had there on his own account hanged many a stout fellow.

There was something specially cruel, too, in the fate of Piers Cockburn of Henderland, another of the forest worthies, who was actually preparing his racks and spits to feast his monarch royally when he was seized and hung up before the door of his own hospitable stronghold.

From the time of this reign of terror on the Borders the clans, broken and dismayed, ceased to rule the Borderside, and peaceful cottars and shepherds replaced the sturdy outlaws of the forest, and great flocks of sheep—the King himself is said to have had ten thousand of his own at one time grazing on the hills—displaced the hart and the hind and the other “wilde beastes.” As late, however, as Queen Mary’s time there was royal hunting in the forest, and the Queen herself followed the wild deer with horn and hound—

Up pathless Etricke and on Yarrow
Where erst the Outlaw drew his arrow.

In the wildest part of pathless Etricke

lies St. Mary’s Loch, a lake that takes its name from the ruined chapel at its head; where the hills range in heights of something like savage grandeur, and close by was once a village of small settlers and cottars, which bore the name of Etrick, and was ruthlessly cleared away early in the eighteenth century to make room for the building of Etrick Hall by some unfeeling proprietor. Popular indignation found vent in maledictory verses containing a prophecy—

Or the trees owre the chimney tops grow green
We winna ken where the house has been—

a prophecy remarkably fulfilled in the event of the hall having followed the cottages to destruction. Etrick Kirk still stands lonely among the wild hills, and near here was the cottage where was born the well-known shepherd, the poet of Etrick Vale.

James Hogg was a veritable shepherd, the descendant of a race of shepherds and herdsmen who had lived on the forest side time out of mind. His father, indeed, had risen to the grazing of his own flock, but only to fall into utter ruin; and Hogg relates that at seven years old he was turned out to earn his own living as a cowherd, his year’s wages in that capacity being an ewe lamb and a pair of new shoes. One winter he had the luck to have a quarter’s schooling, and this, with as much at some other time, was all the teaching he got from recognised sources. And he went on tending cows and sheep till at eighteen he fell in with the ballads of Willie Wallace and the pastoral of the Gentle Shepherd, and so got a turn towards letters; for reading and writing seemed to come to him by nature rather than by instruction; and so he took to making songs and ballads for the lasses to sing in chorus. Among the lasses he became known as Jamie the Poeter, but for long attained no higher fame, or wider rather; for what higher fame can a poet aspire to than the appreciation of the lasses of his acquaintance?

Jamie had never heard of Burns till 1797, a year after the poet’s death, when Jamie himself was in his twenty-sixth year. His delight in Burns was tempered by a little natural jealousy. If a ploughman with his eyes in the furrow could attain such fame, what might not be expected from the genius of a shepherd with his days and nights of meditation, his eyes roaming far over bank and brae or watching the stars in their courses? But in this the shepherd was sadly out of his reckon-

ing, for after all he never rose much beyond the versifier.

But the marvel is that with such scanty culture and in his thirty-eighth year, knowing no more, as he says, of life or manners than a child, he should by sheer force of will and determination push his way to something like literary success.

Where am I gaun—I darena tell;
Alas! I hardly ken myself.
There's something burning in my brain
That leads me out this gate my lane.

The marvel, however, will be lessened when we consider what a strong and vigorous race, of what soundness of intellect and grasp of mind, is the peasant race on that wide stretch of varied country that lies between the Cheviots and the Grampians, a race that has preserved its vigour unimpaired under the strict laws of kirk and session. But when we read of three shepherd lads of Ettrick Vale, of whom Jamie was one, sitting on the hillside and discussing the art of poetry, and resolving forthwith on a poetic competition which was to settle the merits of rhyme against blank verse, we are filled with amazement mixed with a certain amount of incredulity.

The Ettrick shepherd took the publishers by storm, if he did not make an equal impression on the public. He had a pleasant touch with a song, and knew the lilt of the Border ballad; but he lacked the fire that should have lit up the rugged metre; it might burn in his brain, but it did not burn in his heart, as with the Ayrshire ploughman. And thus the shepherd is more than a little disappointing. Having done so much we wonder that he does no more, but the well-spring has exhausted its strength in reaching the surface, and lacks the power to overflow in a full, perennial stream. But on his own ground the shepherd is always interesting; the mischief is that he is too much the man of letters and not enough of the shepherd, when he takes pen in hand; and we get the familiar tap of the big drum instead of the notes of the shepherd's oaten pipe, rarer and more sweet.

Our notions of Hogg as to his personality are mostly derived from the "Noctes" of Professor Wilson. Hogg appears with the accessories of haggis, whisky toddy, oysters, and all the apparatus of a Scotch symposium, and Hogg's protests at the part he was made to play, and at the sentiments put into his mouth, and all this was part of the fun that delighted the conductors of *Maga* in those early days. It was a laughing, screech-

ing time, all kinds of jokes and mystifications were flying about, of which the shepherd was often the subject; but he was a distinct and powerful figure in the literary circle of Modern Athens, which in his time was in the fulness of its power.

But Hogg never altogether abandoned his vocation, and strange to say, while he made a good deal of money out of his books, all things considered, he lost it again over his sheep. If for a while he lived among the wits in Edinburgh, edited, wrote, quarrelled fiercely, and spent gay nights at the Forum with the jovial crew whose high jinks Scott has described with so much force in *Guy Mannering*, if he was driven to this it was because his flock had been a failure, and no man would hire him again as a shepherd. But his heart was always in Ettrick Vale, whose fairy folk had inspired some of his best verses.

Old David spied on Wonfell cone
A fairy band come riding on.
A lovelier troop was never seen,
Their steeds were white, their doublets green,
At every flowing mane was hung
A silver bell that lightly rung.
Fast spur they on through bush and brake,
To Ettrick Wood their course they take.

The poet's desire was fulfilled before long, for a worthy peer, one of the good old race of the Scotts of Buccleuch, Duke Charles of that ilk, offered the Border minstrel a home, a house and farm rent free in the very heart of the poet's country and close by the Dowie Dens o' Yarrow. And now the shepherd at home appears as a homely and yet dignified figure, no more successful with his sheep than of old, but making the publishers suffer—a lost art that, of which Hogg was master—for the murrain among the sheep.

And what days were those upon the hills when the sheriff came among them, with something light to be done in the way of quest or session, and then a hard gallop over the hills, full tilt on horseback, to hunt up some old ruin or battered monument. Walter Scott hunted antiquities with all the zest of a sportsman, and he infuses some of his enthusiasm into the lairds and farmers, and set the shepherd lads on their mettle. To-day the auld kirk, the ruined abandoned kirk among the wilds is to be explored. There are rumours of an old slab there which may reward the search of spade and pick. But nothing is found but an old iron pot, which the shirra' is inclined to think may have been part of a helmet, but which from the traces within

the farmers pronounce to have been just left there by the sheep-shearers; recalling the charter verse of Ettrick—

Green hills and waters blue,
Grey plaids and tarry woo.

But all is fun and good-fellowship. The shirra' laughs and jokes from morn till night, and then is always ready for some promising bit of fun. Now he and the shepherd are "leistering kippers" on the Tweed—burning the water, as it is called. The disasters of the night, the leaky boat, and forgotten tar-barrel, all are subjects for Scott's contagious laughter. Or he is sitting gravely, with his toddy in front of him, surrounded by an eager knot of farmers, who in loud voices are discussing over his shoulder the merits of long sheep or short ones. The shirra's joke sets their paws all wagging, whether they understand it or not.

Another kind of guest was Wordsworth, for whom the shepherd acted as guide and host to the bonny holms of Yarrow. In his gray russet suit and broad beaver, and with his dry and cautious manner, the neighbours think he is some horse-coper from over the fell, that their Jamie has got hold of; the name, too, strengthens the impression, as it seems that one Wordsworth was a great dealer of the period, better known on the Borderside than the poet. Wordsworth had already commemorated Yarrow Unvisited in a charming and spirited poem.

Let bees and home-bred kin partake
The sweets of Burn-mill meadow;
The swan on still Saint Mary's Lake
Float double—swan and shadow!

We will not see them; will not go
To-day, nor yet to-morrow;
Enough if in our hearts we know
There's such a place as Yarrow.

Wordsworth's visit suggested the companion poem, Yarrow Visited, which, as the shepherd remarks, with critical acumen, is not nearly so successful. A result, too, for the shepherd was a cordial invitation to visit the Wordsworths at Rydal Mount, of which he availed himself so eagerly that he reached Rydal before his hosts had returned from their Scotch tour. But the visit was marred, and the humbler poet's amour propre wounded by an incident which may be termed the "triumphal arch" business, an incident variously told; but which the shepherd recounts substantially as follows. The scene is the terrace of Rydal Mount; the time, a lovely evening of autumn; an autumn marked by

splendid displays of meteoric fire in the heavens. On this particular night, a radiant arch of lambent flame spanned the star-sprinkled skies, and all had turned out of the house to witness it. The shepherd watched the sight with Miss Wordsworth on his arm, while Wordsworth, his wife, and De Quincey formed a separate group. The poet's sister, a woman of rare, but somewhat troubled spirit, let fall some anxious words of the dire presages that these lights were supposed to bring. "Hoot, mem"! cried the shepherd in his jolly, boisterous tones, "it's just a graun treeumphal arch in honour of the meeting of the poets!"

The saying smote the lofty self-revering poet of the Lakes as it were with a knife. "Poets, poets!" he cried to his companions, "what does the fellow mean? Where are they?" The Ettrick bard did not hear the remark, and so far all was well; but De Quincey amiably lost no time in repeating it, and it cut the poor shepherd to the quick. He never forgot it; could hardly forgive it, although it afterwards occurred to him that De Quincey had possibly invented the speech; or, at all events, put the sting into it, a thing which might very well have happened.

The shepherd's pugnacity, however, is one of the salient features that mark him out as one of the good old Borderers. He fancies that somebody bites his glove at him, and then out claymores and pistols. It was a characteristic fierceness which came down from old times, when a man, hungering for a fight, would hang his glove up in the parish church; a challenge for anybody who dared to take it down. Fierce were the duels, too, in the old Border times. This very Vale of Yarrow owes, it is said, its melancholy associations to a duel between two members of the same family of Scotts, one just married, or on the point of being married, the subject being some family dispute, and the result the death of the bridegroom or lover, while the bride that should have been thrown herself into the stream and is drowned.

The legends of Yarrow, however, are various, and all of vague and doubtful purpose—a vagueness which, perhaps, accords with the doubtful sweetness of the scene, depending more upon sympathy and a mind attuned to the surroundings than upon any distinctness of natural beauty. It is not for nothing that the sorrow of ancient days seems to rest like a mist upon the winding stream.

Meek loveliness is round thee spread,
A softness still and holy;
The grace of forest charms decayed
And pastoral melancholy.

And the Flower of Yarrow is equally
vague and unsubstantial. Who was she
after all? For Wordsworth surely is wrong
when he makes the Flower one of the mas-
culine persuasion. Was she the bride of
yestere'en i' the ballad, or the lass whose
lover comes to woo with horse and hound
and gay gosshawk?

He promised me a wedding ring,
The wedding day was fixed to-morrow;
Now he is wedded to his grave,
Alas, his watery grave in Yarrow!

The tear shall never leave my cheek,
No other youth shall be my marrow.
I'll seek thy body in the stream,
And then with thee I'll sleep in Yarrow.

In itself, the valley so renowned in song
and legend is a simple scene of low green
hills, where a rivulet with bare grassy
banks wanders through, "with uncontrolled
meanderings," a scene which owes much of
its pathos to its bare, peaceful simplicity.
Lower down the stream finds its way
through rich plantations of recent date, to
where the shattered front of Newark's
towers crowns the sylvan scene.

But the head of the stream,

By lone St. Mary's silent lake,
affords the more characteristic prospect,

Shaggy with heath, but lonely bare,
Nor tree, nor bush, nor brake is there;

while the hills rise abruptly from the
water's edge;

And just a trace of silver sand
Marks where the water meets the land.

And here with strange persistency, not-
withstanding his Calvinistic leanings, the
Scottish peasant still brings his dead, al-
though the kirk, within whose precincts
the graves are thicker than elsewhere, has
been a ruin ever since the old faith was
abolished in the land. Here it was that
Scott, in his youth, half dreamed of some
refuge for his weary age.

Here have I thought 'twere sweet to dwell,
And rear again the chaplain's cell,
Like that same peaceful hermitage
Where Milton longed to spend his age.

And here peasants will still point out the
wizard's grave; not of the great wizard,
Michael Scott, who lived, however, close
by according to tradition in his tower of
Oakwood, but of a more humble follower of
his, a priest of the little chapelry:

That wizard priest's whose bones are thrust
From company of holy dust.

Above are the wilds of the Merecleugh

Head, along which a narrow track is still
shown as the route of the Scottish King
when he came to spread death and destruc-
tion along the Borderside.

The King rode round the Merecleugh head
Booted and spurred, as we a' did see.

The round tower near the eastern end
of the loch is Dryhope Castle.

Then gaze on Dryhope's ruined tower,
And think on Yarrow's faded Flower.

Another Flower of Yarrow in this case,
one of the many claimants to the title, was
Mary Scott, who married Elliot of Minto,
and who faded only in due course of
nature, as her descendants are alive at
this day to testify. By Dryhope Tower
opens out the valley of a tributary rill,
within whose solitary recesses lies the
solitary ruined peel of Henderland, where,
as has been already told, Piers Cockburn
was hanged by the King before his own
threshold.

That night the spoilers ranged the vale
By Dryhope Towers and Meggat Dale.

Miles away down the vale, passing New-
ark Castle, where the wandering harper of
Scott's lay was hospitably entertained by the
Duchess, we come to the meeting of the
waters of Ettrick and Yarrow, and, in the
angle of their junction lies Carterhaugh,
famed as a meeting-place of the fairy
conclave.

Fair as the elves whom Jane saw
By moonlight dance on Carterhaugh.

Famed too, in later years, as a meeting-
place for the stout football players of the
Border—a famous gathering having been
held in 1815, when for the last time, perhaps,
and this only in mimic war, the banner of
Buccleuch was raised—and the circum-
stance inspired one of the Ettrick shep-
herd's lyrics.

Lower down the course of the united
streams on the north bank, and just above
Selkirk, is Philiphaugh, noted for the com-
bat in which the rising star of the gallant
Montrose was finally quenched in dark-
ness. Hitherto the career of Montrose
had been a succession of brilliant victories,
the last of which had made him the master
of Scotland. For while the army of the
Covenant had been fighting against King
Charles in England, Montrose had raised
the Highlands for the King, had humbled
in the dust his hereditary foe Argyle,
and dispersed the hasty levies of the Cove-
nanters. The great towns of Scotland
were his, and the loyal nobility and gentry
of the country were zealously working for

him; and the time had now arrived in the judgment of the brilliant commander when he might lead his victorious army into England to the assistance of his royal master. True that the Highlanders melted away from him as his purpose became known, but undismayed, and with the nucleus of a gallant army, Montrose pushed on towards the Borders, and was now with his cavalry quartered in Selkirk; while his infantry were encamped on the opposite side of the river on the plain of Philiphaugh.

But while many of the Border chiefs were loyal to the King, the peasantry were stern and rigid Covenanters to a man, nay, almost to a woman, for the very mistress of the tavern where Montrose was lodged is said to have remarked in the presence of her guest, as she popped a sheep's head into the cauldron, how glad she would be were that the head of Montrose.

At Selkirk lay Montrose, in perfect security as he thought; while if there had been a loyal herdsman or shepherd lad in the whole country side he might have been warned in time, and possibly have changed the result of the whole war. For in the meantime the lords of the Covenant, who were with the army in England, advised by their fugitive brethren of the disasters and despair of their brethren in the north, had dispatched David Lesley, a tried and veteran commander, with a picked force of about five thousand men, chiefly cavalry, the flower of the Covenant army, to make head against Montrose. This force crossed the Borders at Berwick, and hastened by forced marches towards Edinburgh, where Montrose was well content to leave them, intending to settle the matter on quite a different field.

But Lesley on his march, kept in full information by zealous volunteer scouts on every hand of his enemy's movements, suddenly changed his line of march when almost within sight of Edinburgh, and descending Gala Water encamped for the night at Melrose, within five miles in the rear of Montrose's position. But there was not a soul in all Selkirkshire, or in Roxburgh either, to warn the Royalist chief of the near approach of his foe.

The very elements conspired to the ruin of the King's cause, for next morning a thick mist overspread the whole country, and nothing could be discerned beyond a few yards' distance. Only the zealous aid of the country folk could have brought the army of Lesley within striking distance,

and at the last moment it is said that Lesley was wandering hopelessly astray, when a small farmer of the neighbourhood, upon part of whose farm the Royalists were actually encamped, took the guidance of the troops. According to tradition, it was this man who suggested the manœuvre by which the royal troops were to be overwhelmed. As the Border ballad has it:

But halve your men in equal parts
Your purpose to fulfil,
Let ae half keep the water side,
The rest gae round the hill.

Montrose was busily writing despatches to the King, assuring him, so it is said, that his enemies in Scotland were finally disposed of, when the sudden uproar from the camp, the rattle of musketry, and the roar of combat warned him of some serious affair in progress. Hastily assembling his cavalry he dashed across the river to the scene of danger, but only to find his army already defeated and flying in all directions. In vain he strove to rally his men and restore his rank of battle. His horsemen presently joined the flying crowd, and with a handful of men he galloped off up the Vale of Yarrow, having lost everything at one fell stroke, and being reduced within hardly an hour's space from being the master of Scotland, and the saviour of the monarchy, to the lot of a fugitive and outlaw.

We now come to the chief town of the county—chief and only town indeed.

In Selkirk famed in days of yore
For sutors, but for heroes more.

A dull, little Scotch burgh, Selkirk presents few outward attractions, but its history is interesting, if only as an example of a municipality of artisans, who in the strength of their guilds and societies sustained themselves against the rude barbarism that enclosed them on every side. Nor were these men mere slaves of the work-bench, but as ready for the fray as for the feast, marching to battle under the banners of their guild and patron saint as readily as they turned out in civic pomp on a day of feasting and revelry. From the days of the Bruce Selkirk was proud to own itself a royal borough. A hundred men of Selkirk followed their King to the fatal field of Flodden; the town clerk at the head of them, who was knighted by King James on the field of battle. But few of the band returned, and to punish the town for its daring the English burnt the whole place to the ground soon after Flodden, while the inhabitants took refuge

in the woods. But the guild of weavers long could show a knightly pennon which they boasted as a trophy of war, while to be a sutor of Selkirk was to be accounted next in prowess to a paladin of chivalry.

And for long in the north was Selkirk as famous as Cordova among the Latin races for its leather and its shoes. The trade has passed away to other centres of industry, but even now perhaps there are more sutors in Selkirk than in other towns of like population, and half a century ago there was an old rhyme current among the youth of anti-sutorial sympathies :

Sutors ane, Sutors twa,
Sutors in the Back-row.

And harmless as is this ditty in appearance it was only necessary for some urchin to declaim it at the top of his voice in the neighbourhood of the Back-row to bring out all the shoemakers of the place, and all who did them service, like an angry swarm of bees.

Sutors and all turned out after Philip-haugh to plunder the camp of Montrose, after his defeat. There was good looting about there, and the Selkirk men might well compare themselves to the Israelites when they fell upon the camp of the Assyrians. Rich robes, horses, arms, rewarded the skilful plunderers, but the Selkirk men missed the military chest of Montrose, which, according to tradition, was flung into the cottage of a miller and his wife by its bearer, hardly pressed in flight. Thrown off their balance by the sight of all this money, the man and his wife began quarrelling as to the particular use they should put it to—the husband declaring he would buy an estate and become a laird, while the woman was equally decided upon some other project. The noise of their dispute attracted the attention of some of Lesley's soldiers who were riding by, and these, looking in upon the unruly pair, carried off the bone of contention, and divided the contents of the chest among themselves and their comrades.

Another exciting day for Selkirk was in the year 1707, when news was brought to the town of a great fight going on in the meadows, and all the town rushed down to see it. This was the famous Border duel between Pringle, of Crichton, and Walter Scott, of Raeburn, uncle, or perhaps great-uncle, to Sir Walter. The two young men had no apparent cause of quarrel, except that Scott had seen his antagonist bite his glove in what he considered a menacing manner. If there was a woman at the

bottom of the quarrel, some Flower of Ettrick or of Yarrow, her name was kept out of the gossip of the period. The fight was with the national broadsword, and lasted for hours with various turns of interest, eagerly watched and commented on by the spectators. Pringle would more than once have closed the business by an honourable reconciliation, but the other would not hear of it, and was run through the body for his pains, and so died on the field of combat.

A good many years after this—in fact, in the '45—the fame of the sutors of Selkirk brought them an unexpected and unwelcome order to supply the Prince's army with five hundred pairs of shoes, most of which were worn out on the famous march to Derby, the straggling forces who returned being mostly bare-footed. And although the sutors no longer form the majority of the population—yet their ancient supremacy in the town has left many traces in its manners and customs. Thus, until recent years, the ceremony of creating a Burgess was accompanied by a typical act, which seems to suggest that to be free of the town one must also be free of the guild of sutors; this being the meaning apparently of the ceremony of licking the birse or bristles—which every man in the council did in turn, and the neophyte last of all—a ceremony not in any way to be avoided or evaded, unless by one of royal blood.

They have left their traditions too, these sutors, most of which have been forgotten; but there is one eerie tale which is still sometimes told of a sutor who, late one night, served a strange customer with a pair of shoes, which the man carried off under his arm. So strange and weird was his appearance that the sutor followed him to see where he would go. To the shoemaker's horror his customer made straight for the churchyard and descended into [one of the graves. The cobbler had his awl in his hand, and marked the place by sticking it into the ground. Next day the sutor told the story, and, with the assistance of the authorities, the grave was opened, and there, sure enough, in a coffin, was the body of a man fresh and unchanged, while a pair of new shoes laid beside it. The shoemaker took the shoes, which he thought he could turn to better use. But on the following night, at the same time, the same customer appeared in a towering rage, and reproaching the sutor for his dishonesty, seized first his shoes and then

the shoemaker, and, flinging the latter across his shoulder, carried him off to the churchyard. There, next morning, the remains of the unhappy sutor were discovered torn limb from limb.

Those shoemakers of old must have had rather a morbid imagination, one would think, and if this is the best of their stories one can hardly regret that no more of them have come down to us. But we have been long enough about Selkirk, and must find our way over the hills to Dumfries.

CLAUDIA.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER IV.

SEVEN years had gone by somehow: seven long, monotonous, desolate years. Louis Dumaresq had not thought of making any change in them, he seemed incapable of the effort. He came home to the silent rooms every night, and sat as he used to do. Even the Claude remained in its frame, though its beauty was gone for ever, and the holes in it would have astonished and horrified any one, if there had been any to see it. But Louis Dumaresq lived like a hermit and saw no one.

The only effort he had made, beyond just the necessary routine of his work, was in trying to get a clue to the whereabouts of his son. He enquired everywhere. He advertised; he employed detectives; he visited every possible acquaintance who might know something of him; but it was in vain. Clement Dumaresq had gone under, as so many young men do, as completely disappearing as if drowned in Lethe. The only thing his father could discover was that at the same time the girl "Tillie" had vanished also, the concert hall knew her no more. He had made some discoveries about her, and they had given him a pang of self-reproach. Though she sang at such a place, and mixed with the most doubtful company, no one had anything bad to say of the girl. The manager of the rooms declared that she was a "good little thing," kept herself respectable, worked hard, was kind to people, and would "stand no nonsense." He was very sorry to lose her, and had an idea she went off with the young fellow who was so clever at the fiddle, and who called himself Dumas—he thought they were married and gone abroad, and had no doubt they would get on if the young man kept steady, as both were uncommonly clever.

Mr. Dumaresq took back this informa-

tion, and pondered it in his way. He seemed to see how his words about this girl, whom Clement loved perhaps truly and purely, must have enraged him, half wild as he was already on that fatal night. He well understood why he had disappeared after what had happened. Clement had never believed in his father's affection or indulgence, he knew his severe idea of right and wrong, and his extreme fondness for the poor Claude. After such a scene Clement would feel cut off for ever from his father's sympathy, for he little knew his heart. Indeed, Dumaresq had hardly known his own. He would not have believed beforehand how entirely resentment and anger would have died, even at the moment of the greatest injury done him, and that a woman's tenderness and inexhaustible pity would take possession of it instead. It was as if the gentle mother had given him her spirit. He put away the remembrance of the last phase of his boy's life, he dwelt on his childhood and growing youth; on his brightness, the flash of genius in him, his soft heart and caressing ways; the old dog, of which he had been fond, crept into his father's heart, though he had never cared for animals; the old applewoman to whom Clement used to give sixpences and chat with about "Oireland," in his winning way, was surprised at the grave, grey gentleman stopping to talk and giving her a shilling over and over again. When he sat alone in the dim room he recalled the boyish voice and laugh, the music of the little old violin, the tune which he called the "Claude tune" haunted his ear with a half soothing persistence. The story of the son who came home, and of the father who fell on his neck and kissed him, lay at his heart.

One day in the beginning of December, about five o'clock, Louis Dumaresq came home. It was a Saturday, and he was earlier than usual. He had nothing to do with his time, and did not care to spend it anywhere but in that old room, where so many hours had worn themselves away. Whenever he opened the door he could not help, though he tried to do so sometimes, letting his glance fall on the spoilt picture. It had one gash through the sparkling water, another through the group of dancing girls; yet the light still caught it and brought out the soft mellowness of the colouring. He got his books; he was a great reader of all kinds of curious literature, and, finding in one of them a subject which was suggestive to him, he got a

piece of paper and sketched in black and white.

He was rather absorbed in his drawing, which took shape that pleased him, and whistled over it very softly, as was his habit when he was designing. Suddenly the low whistle stopped. He raised his head quickly, and listened with a curious intensity of expression. It was only the distant sound of a street musician's fiddle that he caught. What made all the muscles of his worn face quiver as the air was faintly borne in to him?

He started to his feet, ran to the window and threw it open, letting in the damp and smoky air, and, kneeling on the window-sill, stretched his head out, trying not only to hear but to see. The tune was distinct now. It was a light and merry one; but somehow the very lightness of it made it the more pathetic in the misty grayness of the London street. It was the tune which Clement had made years ago—"to fit the picture," as he said. Dumaresq's heart beat audibly to himself, as the notes were repeated more distinctly. He knew in a moment that only one person in the world could play that tune, and that the time had come at last for which he had hungered these weary years.

He left the window, forgetting to shut it, left the room door open too, so that the draught made the lamp on the table flicker and flare. He ran downstairs, as he had never run since he was a boy, opened the great heavy hall door, and went straight up to the wandering musician. He only saw his boy; he never even noticed that a dark-eyed, curly-headed child was holding on to his coat with both her little hands; holding on fondly to the one dear thing in

"Clement—you've come home—at last, my boy!" the father panted out, breathless with his haste. "I've looked for you, wanted you all this while—come in—come in—out of this cold."

He had one hand in his, the other was holding the violin. He clasped the arm, however, since the hand was full. He drew him towards the open door behind them. It was Clement; a moment would have satisfied him of this if he had ever doubted; but seven years of want and folly had wasted him to a shadow. Gemma's great eyes, as they had been in the last months of her life, looked out of his thin, brown, handsome young face, and if he had needed any appeal would have made his father's heart yearn over him.

"But stay, father," the young man said, drawing back a moment to bring forward the little figure half hidden behind him. "Here is another come to ask you to take her in."

Dumaresq stooped and lifted her in his arms without a word. He led the way, carrying the child, who trembled a little, but neither cried nor spoke. Clement followed him; they went silently up the broad dark staircase, silently entered the room from which the young man had rushed seven years ago. Dumaresq drew the old-fashioned sofa close to the fire, stirred it to a blaze, shut the window, and placed the child gently in one corner. Clement sank on the other; he was too exhausted in body for mental emotion; he only glanced up once at the ruined picture. The little girl called out with delight at the warmth, and spread out her eager little hands to it. She was still shuddering with the cold, and with a certain sensitive timidity which was not exactly shyness. Dumaresq stood a moment to look at her, as the firelight flashed on her small oval face, and was reflected in her wonderful dark eyes. He gave a sort of stifled cry at last, a hungry cry of delight.

"Clement," he said, "do you know? do you see? She has your mother's face!"

And kneeling down on the rug before her, he took the thin little arms and put them round his neck; his grey hair touched her thick, crisp, dark curls; he kissed her passionately.

Clement looked at them with a wistful, melancholy smile.

"Yes, I saw that," he said; "I think that was why I came. I thought I would give her to you, for I shan't stay long with her, and her mother's dead. I felt that I must come home and tell you."

"Don't tell me anything yet," the father said, turning from the child with a gesture, as if he would gladly have taken his son into his arms too, only the long habit of reserve forbade. "I'll take it all—everything—for granted, at any rate till you're well. Everything shall stop till then."

"I shall never be well," the young man answered indifferently; "and now that I'm home, and have seen you, I don't mind about that. The child's a good child—I give her to you."

Dumaresq sat down and took her on his knee. She leant her sleepy head on his breast; her little hand rested confidently on his for the first time. Clement leant back as if he had come to

the end of all strength and power of endurance; not unhappy or in pain, only worn out. His deep pathetic eyes were fixed on the picture. He said in a low dreamy voice: "Ah, how often I've thought of it! The poor Claude you were so fond of, I couldn't face you again when I came to myself—it was too much!"

"Clement!" his father cried in an anguish of reproach. "As if it were more to me than you!"

"But, you see, I did not know. I thought I had quite done for myself. I did not know till now what you were, father. But something told me to come and bring the child, I believe. I thought she would make up for it all; for the loss of that. I call her Claudia."

Dumaresq stretched out the hand that had held the child, whose eyes had closed on his breast, and took his son's in a close and tender grasp. They looked at each other sadly but fondly, and the long distrust, the unavailing remorse, the folly, and the waste were forgotten in the first touch of souls which had never met before.

So without any formal explanations, and with but few words of any kind, Clement and his child were taken to his father's heart and home. Each felt that it was not for long, but it was a peaceful and a gentle pause before the parting. Clement watched, as day after day he lost a little of his poor remaining strength, how the child grew and flourished like a happily transplanted flower; and he saw how she had won her way at once into the warmest niche of his father's heart. She made the quiet rooms gay with her innocent laughter; she had a thousand pretty winning ways and tricks of loving. A hand-to-mouth struggle for existence had given her docility and patience; and she was born with a sunny, loving heart. Louis Dumaresq forgot the weary years between at times, and almost fancied that this was his own little daughter—Gemma's daughter. His work was light now, for he had a purpose in it. His money went to buy comforts for Clement; pretty frocks, toys, trinkets for the little one. She never found him cold or stern; he had not a word of repression for her; she had nothing but gentle looks and caressing tones—the proper nourishment for her sensitive, tender, little soul. It was Clement who was quiet and silent now; his days of storm and sunshine were over; he waited calmly, and felt only tired. He had done little with his

gift of genius; but he could scarcely regret it, he was too languid for regrets. Only one last work he had set himself to do, and for that he braced all that was left him of energy, and forced his weary spirits to his secret task. When it was done, and he put down his brush, he said: "Now I can rest; there's nothing left to do."

That evening Dumaresq found his little Claudia waiting on the landing for him, trembling with eagerness, which quivered all through her finely-strung frame. She seized his hand.

"Oh, I've been listening and waiting for you so long! I thought you would never come! There's a surprise for you in there—father's surprise—and I've never told. I said I never would till it was done. Come, come, let me show it you!"

He followed her as she pulled him in with all her little strength, hurrying his steps. He looked first, as he always did now, with anxious glances at his son, who was lying back on the sofa with his arms clasped behind his head. It gave him a pang to see how every day left him whiter, thinner, more brilliant-eyed. There were surely tears, too, behind the drooping lids. But Claudia drew his attention away. "Look up!" she cried, "over there. Not at father; the surprise is there!" And her little finger pointed above the mantelpiece where the Claude had hung, where the frame still hung, but enclosing no longer the spoilt landscape with its wreck of beauty. The frame held now a little wistful face surrounded by a mass of curls, an oval face with soft, deep, tender eyes, and a half open, half smiling mouth.

"Clement!" his father said, and no more, his voice choked, and he put his hand over his eyes. Claudia pulled at the other, crying in disappointed tones:

"Don't you like it? Aren't you pleased? It's me, your little Claudia. I've kept the secret to surprise you. Father's painted me a little every day, and I've sat so still. Don't you like me there, instead of the poor, pretty picture father spoilt when he was naughty, and he was so sorry about? Don't you like it, grandfather?"

He stooped and kissed her.

"Yes, yes, my little Claudia; so much, I cannot talk about it. It is the sweetest picture in the world."

He left the child, who turned well pleased to her doll, and sat down beside Clement, putting his arm half shyly round his shoulders, thus half embracing him.

"I could not bear to see it always

like that," the son whispered, "it was too hateful a reminder. I thought, I fancied if I could put her there instead, you would be pleased. Claudia instead of Claude," he added with a curious little smile. "Will it do instead, father?"

"God bless you, boy! You've made me very happy, and better days are coming—you can paint still. You'll make a man yet."

He did not see the silent shake of the head. Clement said nothing; but he knew that the shadow was deepening, that his brush was laid down for ever, that the rest he wanted was close at hand.

"I have made it all up," he said to himself with weary satisfaction; "I leave him Claudia."

BELZONI.

BELZONI has not had half justice done to him. More than one wealthy traveller, who never attempted anything beyond going up the Nile in his comfortable, well-provisioned dahabieh, being hoisted on Arab shoulders to the top of the Great Pyramid, and taking a hasty glance at Luxor and the valley of the Tombs of the Kings, has, when he returned home, developed a taste for Egyptology; and, after skimming the cream of half-a-dozen learned treatises, has written a book, and has got more talked of than the man who first made Egyptology possible for English people. Napoleon's French savans had done a good deal for science, but the way they went to work was not calculated to smooth the path of those who came after them. They had any amount of armed force at their back; and therefore those for whom armed force was not forthcoming would fare but badly, especially among Arabs, whose commonest proverb is: "The stick came down from heaven." Nevertheless, without any armed force whatsoever, Belzoni managed to do a great deal more than the French had done; while, considering his antecedents, it is a marvel that he was able to do anything at all.

For Belzoni was an acrobat, and a giant to boot; the sort of man who at good, old-fashioned fairs exhibits inside the tent, while a man with a drum calls attention to the inviting picture of him hanging up outside. He was born in Padua in 1778, the son of a Roman barber who had settled in that city. At Rome he was brought up to be a monk, but, he remarks, "the sudden entry of the French altered the course of

my education." Monks seemed at a discount, and the Revolution made young men restless, and so, "being destined to travel, I went off, and have been a wanderer ever since." He came to England in 1803, and lived here nine years; but he does not tell us that during that time he went about the streets like the acrobat of my schoolboy days, who was often to be met with in void spaces around the Tower or by Spitalfields Square, and who, after swallowing fire and pulling out of his mouth shavings enough to stuff a small sack, would appeal for additional funds with the tempting assurance, never fulfilled,—"in my experience at least: "Sixpence more and up goes the donkey!" There is a sketch in the British Museum (Sadler's Wells, vol. xiv.) of Belzoni's booth at Camberwell and Bartholomew Fair in the same year in which he arrived in England. He was six feet seven in height, and correspondingly broad, with a pleasing face and winning manners—altogether a very comfortable, well-proportioned giant, and as an acrobat he went about the London streets and attended the London fairs till he got an engagement at Astley's. Here he posed both as Apollo and as Hercules, in the latter capacity wielding leaden weights beyond the power of ordinary men to lift. He also took to himself a wife of the same gigantic proportions, and when the season at Astley's was over the two went through England exhibiting themselves, the husband trying to combine engineering with his mountebank's work. He had studied hydraulics at Rome, and had really made some improvements in water-engines, but he did not get much encouragement, and the Hercules tricks were very wearing. So in 1812 he made a tour of Spain and Portugal in the capacity of Samson. From Malta he and his wife embarked for Egypt in 1815, and there, to sum up his discoveries in his own words, he "succeeded in opening one of the two famous Pyramids of Ghizeh, as well as several of the tombs of the kings at Thebes. One of these, pronounced by the best scholars to be the tomb of Psammuthis, is the most perfect and splendid monument in that country. The celebrated bust of the young Memnon, which I brought from Thebes, is now in the British Museum; and the alabaster sarcophagus, found in one of the tombs of the kings, is on its way to England. Near the Second Cataract of the Nile I opened the temple of Ybsambul; then journeyed to the coast of the Red

Sea to the city of Berenice, and afterwards visited the western oasis." That is the simple, unpretending record of nearly five years' hard work, accompanied with unexampled success as a discoverer. When he got to Europe he found, he says, so many erroneous statements about his discoveries that he "felt bound to publish a plain statement of facts; and if any one should call its correctness in question, I hope they will do it openly, that I may be able to prove the truth of my assertions." A little in the showman style this: "There's no deception, gentlemen. You can step up and see for yourselves; and if you're not satisfied that it is as I say, why, you can have your money back again." He writes in English, "though the reader will with great propriety consider him guilty of temerity, because he would rather describe his proceedings himself than run the risk of having his meaning misrepresented by another." No doubt his acrobat life had something to do with his contentiousness; while his want of education accounts for the prominence which he gives to his quarrels with French and German interlopers, and to his suspicion of Mr. Salt, our consul, who supplied him with funds for removing the Memnon.

These details detract from the pleasure of reading his book; at the same time they show what real difficulties—smoothed away for explorers nowadays—he managed to surmount.

But how did he get his first start? He does not tell much, though he is not quite so reticent about his beginnings in Egypt as about his early life in England. Some say he "tumbled" into favour with Mehemet Ali, winning the heart of that rather grim sovereign by feats of agility. He, on the contrary, says that what took him to Egypt was his hydraulic knowledge. He proposed, as so many since have done, to better the system of irrigation which has lasted since the Pharaohs. It is quite certain that before long he got an order to set up an improved hydraulic engine in the gardens of the Shubra Palace; for Mehemet Ali was wonderfully accessible to Europeans, and somehow Belzoni had an introduction to M. Baghos, the chief interpreter and director of all foreign affairs.

When he landed in June, 1815, the plague was raging in Alexandria, and he and his wife were put in quarantine.

"Fortunately St. John's Day, when the plague is supposed to cease, was not far off," is his remark on this trying occasion;

and he explains that it is not the saint, but the season, which checks the disease, great heat stamping it out as effectually as cold. Their only anxiety was to hide the sickness which really did seize them both as soon as they got into their lodgings. "Had it been known that we were ill, they'd have set us down as plague-stricken, killed us *secundum artem*, and added us to the tale of victims. Nobody, during the plague, is thought to die of anything else."

After the 24th they got away, and, passing Aboukir with its heaps of fresh human bones, settled at Boulak, close to Cairo, in a house so ruinous that its condition stood them in good stead when the place was plundered by a party of mutinous troops.

While waiting to be presented to the Bashaw, Belzoni managed to see the sun rise from the top of the Great Pyramid, and to visit those of Saccara and Dajior, and to meet the great traveller Burckhardt, a meeting to which we owe a good many of our best Egyptian antiques. Riding up to the citadel with M. Baghos to see Mehemet Ali, he admired "the majestic appearance of the Turkish soldiers;" but soon found that looks are not everything, for one of these noble-looking fellows, passing on horseback, managed, out of pure spite, to cut two inches of flesh out of his leg with the sharp corner of his shovel-like stirrup. The wound was so serious that it kept him prisoner a whole month; and when "Ali Bashaw" noticed his limp and learned the cause, he simply said: "such accidents will happen when troops are about." The soldiers just then hated the very look of a Frank, for Ali was trying to teach them European drill. There was a mutiny about this not long after, and the attempt had to be given up; the mutineers getting off scot-free, though Belzoni remarks that just then there came on an unaccountable mortality among the high officers of the army.

By-and-by, after he had got into high favour with Ali, our traveller was nearly killed by a bimbashi, out of whose way he could not get, a loaded camel filling up the street. The bimbashi (lieutenant) gave him a blow in the stomach, which he repaid by cutting him over the naked shoulders with his whip. "The fellow then took out his pistol. I jumped off my ass; but the shot singed the hair near my right ear, and killed one of his own soldiers, who was getting behind me. He took out a second pistol; but his own men disarmed him." This was a narrow escape; for just then

the daughter of Chevalier Bocty, Swedish consul-general, was riding with a party of ladies, her mother among them, to get a bath, when a soldier shot her dead out of pure wantonness.

There was great trouble in getting his machine, which was to do with one ox as much as the native engines did with four, set up. Nobody would work for him; the smiths and carpenters argued that, if he succeeded, where three engines were used there would be only need for one, and so their tradewould suffer. Still he persevered, though the sight of a hydraulic machine, worth £10,000, which had been sent out as a present to Ali, and was quietly allowed to rust away where it had been unpacked, was not encouraging. Belzoni's engine, however, did begin work in the presence of Ali and a body of experts; and everybody admitted that it did at least as much work as four of the machines in use. "But then," said the Pasha, "it'll cost four times as much;" and the deputy-governors, who would only have the control of 100 oxen, and a man to each ox, where now they had 400, were determined that it should not come into use. Mehemet's love of practical jokes, however, settled the question. A man who spent all his time with buffoons, and had been more pleased with the shock that Belzoni gave him after he had repaired an electrical machine that had long been lying useless, than with all his irrigation plans, thought nothing of ordering the oxen in the wheel to be replaced by men. Fifteen were put in, and along with them would go Curtin, the young Irish lad whom Belzoni had taken with him from England. But the moment the thing moved, out jumped all the Arabs, and of course the weight of the water sent the wheel spinning backwards so rapidly that the catch couldn't hold it. Curtin was thrown out and got a broken thigh, "and would have been crushed to death had not I managed to stop the engine." This accident was fatal: "It was not the will of Allah that the Frank machine should go on working in Egypt."

The question now was: should he go back to Europe, or take the opportunity of seeing some of the wonders of the land? He would have to economise; for, unlike his successors, Mehemet was a bad paymaster. "All that was due to me from the Bashaw was consigned to oblivion;" and Consuls-General in those days were not powerful enough to enforce even a just claim. He counted the cost, and found that he could manage to go—of course

with Mrs. Belzoni—to Assouan and back; but when he went to Mr. Salt, our Consul-General, for a firman, the Consul asked him if he would undertake to convey to Alexandria the bust of "the little Memnon," which had been lying inside a temple at Gournou near Thebes, ever since the French severed it from its body with the view of carrying it off. Belzoni is very anxious to prove that he got from Salt none of his personal expenses, nothing but the bare cost of getting the bust to the water's edge and putting it on board; and of this he said that Burckhardt, who had long been trying to persuade Ali to send the thing as a present to the Prince Regent, told Mr. Salt he would pay half. Salt's letter, given at full length, is certainly—as poor Belzoni says—"in an assuming" (and amusingly dictatorial) "style," but there is not a word in it about payment to the explorer. Be this as it may, Belzoni's work is an instance of what tact and imperturbable good-humour will accomplish in spite of every kind of drawback. The French ex-consul, Drouetti, was very anxious to send the Memnon to its original destination, the Louvre; and he managed, by small presents, to make Cacheffs and Kaimakans thwart Belzoni in all sorts of ways, even to the extent of putting in chains the workmen with whom they themselves had provided him.

It was very provoking. The Nile was beginning to rise; and, unless the Memnon could be speedily moved to the causeway by the river, there would be no chance of getting it off till next year. There was Belzoni, marvelling at Thebes, "that City of Giants," in a hut in which he had placed his wife, fretting himself into an intermittent fever at the trickery and delays, at last getting together a few men, who all thought the bust must be full of gold, and proposed to blow it in pieces instead of dragging it along. Then came the triumph of moving it a few feet, and the joy of tilting it on to the cart, which his Greek carpenter had prepared for it! It goes steadily on, not making much way, for it is Ramadan, and the wonder is how the poor fellaheen can work at all when they don't taste food till sundown. The river is not far off; they have reached the middle of the marsh which lies between it and Gournou, when, one morning, not a man appears. "How is this? It means absolute ruin. If the water comes up while we're in this soft ground, Memnon will get embedded so deeply that all the Bashaw's men—they don't use draught

horses out there—won't be able to get him out again. Bah! these smooth-spoken Turks are all the politer the more determined they are not to do what they promise." Happily, Mrs. Belzoni's health was splendid, far better than her husband's. She hadn't got young Memnon on her mind, and "she was constantly among the women in the tombs," learning the "Manners and Customs," which form such an interesting appendix to her husband's book. So she could be safely left while Belzoni crossed to Luxor, in quest of "that rogue of a Kaimakan, who had ordered the fellahs not to work for the Christian dogs any longer." This time the Kaimakan was the very reverse of polite; he exhausted on the mothers of the whole of Frangistan all the flowers of Eastern Billingsgate; and, encouraged by Belzoni's patience, "for my patience was great," he tried to lay hands on him, and, when the good-humoured giant resisted, actually drew his sword. This was going too far. "Before he could think of his pistols I had seized and disarmed him, my janizary taking up the weapons, and after keeping the fellow in the corner, kneeling on his stomach and giving him a good shaking, I said I should send his arms to Cairo to show the Bashaw how his orders were executed." The Kaimakan thereupon became very humble, and said he was only doing as the Cacheff bade him; so off went Belzoni to Erments, and coming in just at dinner-time had to take his part in the scramble for roast mutton and pilau, at which Hadjis and Santons went with sleeves tucked up to the elbows. "The men must work for the Bashaw," said the Cacheff, when with the coffee came the time for opening up the subject. "Be content till next season." "Very well; you refuse, and I'll get men from Luxor, and then you'll lose the merit of helping in the work. To Luxor I'll return this very night." "Nor need you fear the night journey with such a fine pair of English pistols as those in your belt." "They are yours, Cacheff, if you please; but I've written to Cairo for a far finer pair, which are on their way to you."

The Cacheff put his hands on my knees, and saying: "We shall be friends," dictated a firman for all the men Belzoni wanted and sealed it forthwith. And so, despite Drouetti, the statue was got to the Nile bank before the waters had risen.

While waiting for a big boat to put it in, Belzoni felt he must see something more of Egyptian wonders; and so, passing

Ombos, Dakke, and all the now well-known places "where the fellahs' huts inside the temples look as mean as wasps' nests," he gets to Ybsambul (Abu-Simbel they now call it), with the six colossi, each 30 feet high, sitting at its doorway. The doorway was so blocked with sand, that not till his second voyage, when he had the help of Captains Irby and Mangles and Mr. Beechey, did he manage to get inside. In the British Museum as it was (I don't know how it is now), the walls of an upstairs Egyptian room were covered with frescoes worked up from the sketches which Belzoni copied under difficulties (with the thermometer at 130 deg.) in one of the rooms in this temple. This opening up of the great temple he thought a grand triumph; for everything had to be done by influence, money being of little use up there in Nubia. When he held up a piastre the sheiks laughed and said: "Who'll give six grains of dhourra for a bit of iron like that?" One thing was in his favour—the people had none of the Arab fear of the supernatural. "They are so accustomed to be among the mummies, that they think no more of sitting on them than on the skins of their dead calves. I, too, became indifferent about them at last, and would have slept in a mummy-pit just as readily as out of it."

This time the temple remained sealed; and Mr. and Mrs. Belzoni made their way up to the Second Cataract, sleeping on one of the islands, among a strangely primitive people, to whom a looking-glass was a marvel of marvels. On his way down, Belzoni landed at Philoë, and found that a beautiful bas-relief group of sixteen blocks of stone, of which he had taken possession and which he had cut thin for convenience of shipment, had been mutilated by some rival curio-hunter, who had scrawled "opération manquée" on several of the blocks. "Drouetti again, or one of his agents"; and Belzoni's endeavours to bring them to justice for this and other misdeeds, take up a good deal of his second volume. Indeed this Drouetti business so worried him that his last word, in September 1819, was: "Thank God, we are embarked for Europe; not that I dislike the country, on the contrary, I've reason to be grateful. Nor do I complain of Turks and Arabs in general, but of some Europeans out there, whose conduct and mode of thinking are a disgrace to human nature." Unhappily the number of such scoundrel Franks is increased several hundredfold since Belzoni's day; they are

a curse to Egypt and a reproach to Christianity.* What astonishes me is how the Roman barber's son picked up English enough to write so fluently, unless indeed he was helped by Mrs. B., who, when he went a second time up the Nile, said: "Go to Thebes again I would not," and who actually managed (while he was gone) to see Syria and the Holy Land, getting into the temple at Jerusalem (the Mosque of Omar, of which she gives a plan), and losing her shoes in so doing. Anyhow, her style is very like his in its bitterness; she talks of "a countryman of mine" (who had laughed at her stories about Nubian women), as one "whose merit lies in low buffoonery, caricaturing, and imitating like a monkey those in whose company he has been, particularly unprotected females and old men."

There is plenty more in Belzoni's book—how he moved out of the tomb of Seti I., at Karnak, the splendid alabaster sarcophagus for which Sir J. Soane (in whose Museum it is) gave him £2,000; how he hit on a door in the Second Pyramid of Ghizeh, which, since Herodotus's day, had been supposed to be solid, and found in it the sarcophagus of Chephrenes; how he got from Philœ island and sent down as far as Rosetta the big obelisk which Dr. Erasmus Wilson afterwards brought to the Thames Embankment, and this despite the mishap of seeing the pier, from which it was to be shipped, slip down into the Nile—obelisk and all. All this is told in his pleasant way, with much vituperation of "Rossignano the Renegade" and his master, Drouetti, and some signs of jealousy because Consul Salt got so much glory out of matters in which all the hard work had been his.

He is specially proud of his trip to the Red Sea and identification of the City of Berenice; and he insists that the oasis which he visited was really that of Jupiter Ammon. There he had to tell the sheiks, who had heard of his finding in one temple a golden cock filled with precious stones, that he was not come for treasure, but to ascertain, by collecting inscribed stones, whether the ancestors of his nation had or had not come from those parts.

Visiting Italy on his way back to England, he was made much of by the Paduans, to whom he gave two Egyptian statues. They set up a monument to him and struck a gold medal (now in the British Museum)

* "For the Land of Egypt is alle fulle of Devyls and Fiendes that were clepen Bondholders."—Mr. Lang to Sir J. Maundeville in "Letters to Dead Authors."

with a commemorative inscription. In England he opened the Egyptian Hall, and therein exhibited a model, from drawings and wax impressions, of the two chambers of Seti's tomb. This was also exhibited in Paris, where nobody paid much attention to it. At Berlin, however, his idea was acted upon—the Egyptian museum there is partly underground and exactly represents a series of tomb chambers. Taken in hand by that art-patron, the Duke of Sussex, Belzoni might have lived in honourable comfort in England; but such a man, whose suspicion of Mr. Salt shows eccentricity, if not wrong-headedness, could not rest quietly. "Destined to travel," he determined to prove the old theory that the Nile and Niger are one river; and getting funds from the firm of Briggs at Alexandria, and failing to obtain leave to go through Morocco, he began from Cape Coast, the King of Benin giving him his royal stick in sign of full authority. But Mrs. Belzoni was not there to look after him, and he died of dysentery at Gato, in December, 1823.

Considering Belzoni's origin, one cannot help rating him as the most extraordinary of Egyptologists. He opened the road for Lepsius, Mariette, Brugsch Bey, and the rest; and the genial way in which he accepted his early position in England without accepting degradation along with it (as too many Englishmen would have done under like circumstances), doing his best as a mountebank, yet never losing sight of better things, contains a wholesome lesson.

VICTIMS.

By THEO GIFT.

Author of "*Lil Lorimer*," "*An Alibi and its Price*,"
Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER XVI.

"ON ALL SIDES SORE BESET."

"VERA, is that you, my dear? What a long time you have been out to-day! I've been watching for you to come in this half hour. Your papa wants you."

It was getting late in November; the sapphire blue summer sea had been exchanged for grey, foam-capped waves, which raged and thundered against the black rocks of Penmarc'h and the Pointe du Raz, and on stormy days made the echoes of their roaring heard as far as Les Châtaigniers and even Pont l'Abbé. The heather had shed all its pretty purple bells, and only a solitary yellow flower showed here and there on the gorse bushes dotting

the wide moorland stretches, made weird and mystic by the presence of strange, grim-looking menhirs, monuments of a past age, baring their heads against a windy sky, and keeping their strong feet warm with withered bracken and silvered moss.

Vera's daily walk, however, led her for choice along the lanes where there was at least shelter to be had, and where, now and again, the fading oak-leaves in the hedgerow above flung out a golden wreath, and, mingling with the blood-red streamers of wild raspberry and blackberry branches, lent a touch of colour to the landscape which would have delighted an artist's eye. They gave little comfort to Vera, however, and she was looking chilled and tired as she came into the hall, and dropped wearily on to the nearest chair in order that P'tit-Jean, who, unsuspected little traitor that he was, was specially deputed by Madame to attend the young lady in her walks, might remove her goloshes. Her mother's words made her look up with a nervous start.

"Papa wants me, mamma? What for? I haven't done anything to vex him, have I?"

"Why, what should make you think so, you foolish child?"

But though Madame smiled as she asked the question, the merriment was decidedly forced, and there was a paleness in her cheeks and a curious twitching about the mouth which, had Vera noticed them, might have roused her wonder. "You are always fancying evils beforehand, Vera; but just now I believe your papa has something very—very pleasant to say to you. So come along with me, and don't look frightened."

"Mamma!" cried Vera. In a moment the blood had rushed into her pale face making it scarlet. A vision of Marstland in the study, of her father relenting and telling them to be happy, rose before her and dazzled her eyes. She could hardly speak. "Mamma, oh, is it——"

"You are not to ask me what it is. Your papa will tell you. But, indeed, Vera, it is great good fortune, and I hope you will feel it so," Madame St. Laurent said impressively; but her voice shook, and though she came beside her daughter and smoothed her hair, which the wind had ruffled, she did not look at her, and seemed to avoid the touch of the girl's appealing hand.

"Come, dear," she said with a curious catch in her breath, which even Vera noticed with increasing excitement, and

led the way quickly to her husband's study at the back of the house.

There was no Marstland there at all events, and the room looked comfortless enough, with no fire, and the uncurtained windows staring out on a vista of untidy "basse-cour," dilapidated hay-ricks, and grey sky, while M. St. Laurent himself, clad in an old dressing-gown and with his feet on a "chaufferette," scarcely wore as promising an aspect as his wife's words foretold; but as Vera entered, looking about her with wide, eager eyes, and a rapidly beating heart, he smiled in what was certainly meant to be an encouraging manner, and said, with even an attempt at joviality:

"Eh, well, little cat, so here you are! And what have you to say for yourself, for I suppose you know very well what I have sent for you for?"

"Papa, have you consented?" cried Vera huskily. It was cruel. The girl's expression was lovely at the moment; her eyes at once radiant and suffused; her lips apart; the pink colour coming and going in her cheek. Even Madame, cold as she was, could not bear to look at her, but bent nervously over the knitting which she had taken up on seating herself. Only Monsieur remained unmoved, and observed jocularly:

"Consented! Ma foi! one is not left much choice when it is a question of one's daughter becoming a Countess, and one of the richest women in Finisterre. Ah, the poor old father and mother will be put in the shade entirely. They have done what they could for their child hitherto, and now it is she to condescend to them; but there! she is a good girl with all her little faults, and parents must not be selfish. My daughter, I congratulate you!"

Vera had put out one hand to the nearest chair as if for support. It was an involuntary movement, a grasping at anything by which she could hold in that moment of reaction in which a great gulf appeared to open before her; a gulf across which she seemed to see, not Marstland's face any longer, but the Count's, with that look in it from which—while not even comprehending its meaning—she had shrunk with instinctive repugnance. A mist came over her eyes, so tender in their bashful joyousness a moment back, and she stammered out:

"Papa, I—I don't understand."

"Not understand! Nay, then, fillette, there is no need to affect that little air of astonishment with your parents. It will be very pretty and in the right place for the Count when he comes; but you are

not a 'bébé' to have misunderstood his attentions to you of late; though perhaps you were hardly prepared to hear already that he has done you the honour of proposing to us for your hand."

"For me! The Count! Oh, papa, he can't really mean it!" Vera cried incredulously. "Why, he is quite—quite old! He has always been your friend."

Her father's lips curled ironically. Poor Vera had a knack of saying the wrong thing with him.

"All the better reason for his being yours, my dear. A sensible girl finds her best friends among those who are her father's already. It is a tribute to both of us, that having been my best friend so long the Count should now wish to make himself yours; and I hope you will thank him for it in your prettiest style when he comes to you this evening for his answer."

"I ought to thank him, I suppose; but—but what do you mean by my 'answer,' papa?" Vera asked, her eyes beginning to fill and her lips to tremble. "I can't—he must know I can't do anything but thank him. I—"

"And nothing more is required of you, petite," Monsieur interrupted blandly. "The word was in truth a silly one, seeing that we, your parents, and the only persons having the right to dispose of your hand, have already answered him and in the one way possible. The Count is a man of the world, and can appreciate the modesty proper to a young lady in your position. It is a great thing for a little girl like you to become a Countess, Vera."

"Yes, I know, but I couldn't—I couldn't—
—Indeed, I am sure he means to be kind," Vera faltered, the tears coming fast now; "but I don't want to be great, and I never thought of him for a moment in that way. I never could. Papa, you know—"

"I know? Truly, Mademoiselle, you pay too great a compliment to my perspicuity, and I must ask you to explain yourself. I call you here to inform you of the happy and prosperous future in store for you—one indeed which will cause you to be the envy of every girl in the department—and in reply you make me a scene! See now, I am not fond of scenes; but you are young, and young girls are apt to be silly and hysterical when taken by surprise. I am willing therefore to believe that you were surprised a moment back; but now that you have had time to reflect and take in the good fortune proposed to you, I

should like to hear what you have against it, or more particularly against the Comte de Mailly in the character of your husband. It appears to me that you have been very willing to receive him in that of an admirer."

Vera's cheeks were crimson.

"Papa, indeed I never intended to do so. I never thought or dreamt of such a thing. Why, he has been coming here so long, ever since I was a little girl. I thought it was to see you only. How could I fancy anything else?"

"Ah, bah! Girls have fancies which they do not always confess, even to their directors; though, by-the-way, you, poor unfortunate, have not got one. Never mind, the Count will alter all that, I dare say, and a good thing too. At any rate let there be no fancies now. I, your father, tell you in so many words that this gentleman, your oldest friend as you say, wishes to marry you. Your mother and I have given our consent. All you have got to do is to repeat it in whatever pretty words occur to you. Voilà, the affair is settled. That will do."

"But I cannot—I cannot. Oh, mamma, won't you speak to papa for me?" Vera exclaimed, crouching suddenly down by her mother and clinging to her. "If it had been earlier even, before—but now you know it is impossible; that he—Dr. Marstrand cared for me first. Oh! I know you sent him away, and I have tried not to fret, to be patient. I thought if we waited—if you ever knew him better—I could never, never marry anyone else."

Vera's voice was choked in weeping, and Madame St. Laurent, putting one arm round her, looked appealingly at her husband. He only answered the mute entreaty, however, with an angry stare, and, turning to Vera, said, in a tone of biting sarcasm more cutting than a lash: "So, Mademoiselle, this is the secret of your extraordinary conduct! You are still then thinking of that adventurer whom I chased from my house long enough ago, as I hoped, for you to have forgotten his name, even if shame did not prevent you from recalling it. But you, it seems, have neither shame nor decency, and it is I who have to blush for my daughter—my daughter who has the hardness to tell me that she waits—waits for a man she has seen half-a-dozen times; an impertinent who was probably amusing himself with her, and who has been kicked out of her father's house for his presumption! If a man of honour

like De Mailly were to hear this, it might well be that he would withdraw from his offer altogether, and——"

"Oh, papa, papa! but he ought to hear it; he ought to know; he must!" cried Vera, lifting her head quickly from her mother's knees, and speaking with a kind of trembling, desperate eagerness which found a momentary support in the mere feel of the maternal arm which was still around her. "It would not be right to let him think that I—that I—and I cannot help it. It was before I knew—and I know—I know that he is waiting too. I could never—— Mamma, won't you have pity? Won't you tell him? Oh, you must know I—I couldn't be—shameless as papa says!"

The girl had broken down altogether. She was shaking all over, cold as ice, and sobbing in great gasps like some drowning creature. Madame St. Laurent almost lifted her on to her feet, and, turning to her husband, said imploringly:

"St. Laurent, let me take her away. It is no good saying anything more while she is in this excited state. She will see things differently afterwards, when I have talked to her a little. Come, Vera; hush! Your papa will let you go to your room for awhile."

She led the girl away as she spoke, emboldened by getting no more decided negative from her husband than an angry growl; but directly they were outside the door Vera's unwonted agitation overcame her. She turned faint, and her mother had to call Joanna, and between them to carry her to bed.

It was palpably impossible to say any more to her either then, or when, the faintness having passed off, the girl's overstrained nerves found vent in hysterical weeping. Even Joanna observed that it would be "sheer cruelty to go on at her again that afternoon, at any rate; leastways, unless they wanted to drive the child into a fever." But as, under these circumstances, it was equally impossible for her to receive the Count that evening, as had been intended, it became necessary for M. St. Laurent to go over to Mailly and put his friend off, on the plea of Vera's illness, a severe chill—it was decided to call it—caught during her walk in the lanes that afternoon.

For the rest of that day, therefore, Vera was left in peace, and allowed to stay in her room, where she spent the time lying on her bed, crying sometimes over this

unlooked-for complication in her fate; but at others thanking God, in her ignorance, at having, as she thought, got over it with no worse result, and even a little proud at having found courage to do battle, however feebly, for the love to which she had pledged herself. One appeal for sympathy she did make; not to her mother, who after the work of restoring her had been partially successful, kept away from the room, as if on purpose to avoid further words on the subject, but to Joanna who brought her up her dinner, rather invitingly set out on a little tray, and insisted on cuddling her up in a big shawl while she ate it, observing, in a gruffly good-natured way, that it was no use for folks to be sick or starve themselves because they made other folks angry with them.

Vera looked up, her cheeks a moment back so pale, blushing vividly.

"Is papa still so angry then?" she asked nervously. "I suppose you know why it is—that mamma has told you?"

"I didn't need your ma to tell me, Vera. Of course I know. Your pa has made up a fine match for you, and you're silly enough not to be pleased with it. It's enough to make anyone angry. Why, lor' bless the child! what more d'you want?"

"I don't want the Count," said Vera decisively. "Why, Joanna, I wonder at you. He's nearly as old as papa, and so stout and bald! I don't believe anyone would have dreamt of his wanting to marry a girl like me. Now would they truly, Joanna? Is it even natural?"

"I don't know anything about 'natural,'" said Joanna with some embarrassment; "but as to dreaming, I've never dreamt of anything else this long time; nor I don't suppose has anyone in the neighbourhood. Where were your own eyes, Vera, not to see it for yourself? And I thought you did see it. You've seemed to look to his visits a good deal of late."

"Because they made papa more cheerful, and because, when it is so dull, any visitor is pleasant," said Vera with doleful frankness. "I should never have cared to see him even once if there had been anyone else. Why, I quite disliked him when I was a little girl, and I thought mamma did too. Besides, if he were ever so nice, I shouldn't want to marry him. I shall never marry anyone but—but the gentleman you saw in London; and oh, Joanna, how can you even talk of the Count when you did see him; when you know how different they are!"

"I should think they was different!" said Joanna curtly. "An' it's you I wonder at, Vera, comparing that cheeky young chap with a respectable gentleman like the Count, who can give you a mint of money, and make a lady of title of you into the bargain. Why, think o' that! Just to hear it would ha' made your grandfather get out of his grave with pride, and here are you turning up your nose as if you was a born Duchess. As for that other one, I don't believe he meant a bit of good, and if you ask me I tell you so plainly. Doctor, indeed, he called hisself! A man as couldn't speak civilly to a respectable female when he saw one. Medical student, more likely, I should say, with all that hair an' moustache; and if you'd ever lived servant in a house where six on 'em boarded, as I did, you'd know what sort they are. The rampagousest, devil-may-care lot as ever you see; and thinkin' no more of gettin' young girls into trouble and ruinin' them than of drinking brandy of a mornin'. 'See him!' Bless you, I saw through him the first moment I clapped eyes on him, an' you might ha' knocked me down with a feather when I see those Josephses lettin' him make free with you in the way he did. You may thank your stars and me, my child, as Mounseer don't know of it and that you're shut of him in time;" and Joanna took up the tray and marched out of the room.

Alas for poor Vera's feeler after even an old servant's sympathy! The failure of it left her more downhearted than ever; and, as soon as she was left alone, the tears came again, and she fairly cried herself to sleep.

It was late when she awoke. A little wood fire was burning in the room. Someone had put a warm wrap over her feet, and a lamp stood on the dressing-table, beside which her mother was seated working. The girl started up half dazed, thinking at first that it was the middle of the night, and wondering why her head ached so, and why she had been sleeping in her clothes; but before she could do more than push the damp hair back off her poor swollen eyes, and utter a half inarticulate exclamation, Madame St. Laurent was at her side, speaking kindly and giving her a cup of tea.

"What is the matter, mamma? Is it late?" Vera asked hazily.

"It is just ten. You ought to be in bed; but you have had a nice long rest, and so, as I was to talk to you a little, you had better drink this and listen seri-

ously to me. You can't think, you know, Vera, that you will be allowed to go on in this way."

Vera's pale face became paler.

"Mamma," she said trembling, "you don't mean— Oh! surely papa won't persist in wanting me to marry the Count whether I like him or not?"

"We want you to be reasonable, Vera, and it is not being so to talk in that way. You do like the Count. You were only saying the other day how kind he had been in bringing you flowers."

"I know I did, mamma, because I thought that it was kindness, and not that he wanted—" Vera broke off and blushed furiously. "I should have hated him if I had thought he was thinking of me in that way."

Madame St. Laurent gave a short, impatient sigh.

"What do you mean by 'that way'?" she asked coldly. "Really, Vera, I don't know what has come over you. You hardly seem like my own child, talking in this wild, exaggerated way about hating men, and all that. It positively isn't nice to hear you."

The tears came into Vera's eyes.

"I didn't mean to be wild or exaggerated, mamma; but surely one ought not to marry a man one does not love, and I know I could never, never love the Count. Do you think I could?"

"My dear, pray don't speak so excitedly. That is just what I am saying. How can you know anything of the sort? Of course you don't love him yet. It wouldn't be seemly you should, before he has even spoken to you on the subject. No well-bred girls do such things. Nor are you asked to marry him at once; only to remember that, as you will do so some day, there is no harm in your knowing that he loves you now, and feeling affectionate and grateful to him in return. Come, my child, do not be wilful. You were ready enough a little while ago to fancy yourself in love with an almost total stranger, because he chose to pay you attention, and turned your head, I suppose, with silly compliments; while now, when a friend you've known all your life, a good, steady man, whom your parents approve of, offers to make you his wife and devote his life to you, you cry, and faint, and go on as if something dreadful was proposed to you. My dear, can't a young girl like you trust her parents to know what is best for her happiness, and take pleasure in pleasing them?"

"But does it please you then, mamma?" cried Vera, fixing her large eyes suddenly on her mother's face. "Do you think the Count would be the best person to make me happy? For that is what puzzles me. I should never have thought you would. I know papa is fond of him, that they were friends even before I was born; but I never thought you liked him, or that you wanted me to. You never seemed to do so or even to care about taking me with you to Mailly when he invited us. I used to fancy you didn't much like him to take notice of me, and I never remember your ever praising him before. But with Dr. Marstland—Mamma, don't be angry. I wouldn't speak of him, only you did—it was, oh! so different. It is true I had not known him long; but the Josephses had, and you can't think how highly they thought of him. Mrs. Josephs was almost as fond of him as if he had been her son; and Leah—mamma, you know how clever and sensible you used to think Leah was—she always said she knew no one quite like him, so talented, and good, and upright. Indeed it was because of that, and because he seemed to care so much for her, that I first cared for him; not—not because he paid me compliments."

"Indeed!" said Madame drily.

This unwonted outburst was rather a relief to her, for her cheek had burnt uncomfortably at Vera's opening remarks. Was it not too true that, in her morbid jealousy of the Count and his pretensions, she had actually predisposed the girl against him, and helped to block the path she was now trying to open?

"This is quite a new story. So Leah Josephs was as much in love with this hero as you imagine yourself to be; and he cared for her almost as much, and was already treated like a son-in-law by her mother! Then may I ask why he didn't propose to marry her, and let you alone?"

"Indeed, mamma," said Vera simply, "I don't wonder at your asking that. I quite thought myself that he was going to propose to her; that it was almost settled, until—"

"Until he threw her over to make love to you! I suppose he thought you had money, and would be a better catch than a Jewish singing mistress with nothing but what she earned. Well, Vera, I can't say it was very genteel conduct in you to be so willing to take away your friend's lover; and I don't wonder now at her giving you up so easily."

"Mamma, what are you saying?" cried Vera, her face white as a ghost, her eyes quite wild-looking. Leah, her darling, adored Leah, in love with George Marstland, and she—!

"My dear, it is all as plain as possible. Of course I did say that I didn't wish any acquaintance kept up; but I own till now I have wondered at her never even answering me. However, if her lover—and a fickle, worthless scamp he must be—had already jilted her for you, I dare say she was glad enough to see you gone and out of his way."

"But, mamma, indeed, indeed you are quite wrong," cried Vera, a whole wave of loving memories sweeping over her and giving her courage to protest against this cruel suggestion. "Leah never even thought of Geo—of Dr. Marstland in that way; nor he of her. You forget that he is a Christian and she a Jewess. They would neither of them dream of marrying one another. He told me so."

"He told you! Did you ask him, Vera? Things must have gone far between them then for you to do so indelicate a thing as to question a young man on such a subject. But the more I hear of your behaviour over there the more it distresses me. And as if it was not likely he would say whatever he thought would please you!"

"But, mamma, it was not only he. Leah herself was as pleased as possible when I told her he had—had spoken to me; and though she did say he should have written to you first, she wished me joy—oh, ever so affectionately—and I am sure she hoped almost as much as we did that you—"

"In other words, my dear, Leah Josephs had spirit enough to pretend to take it easily, and you were so simple you believed her. Ah, well, I dare say the young man has gone back to her now that he has learnt there is no chance of getting you; and I must say, Vera, that if you are still wishing you could take him away—"

"Mamma, if Leah had ever loved him the least little bit, or he her, I would never be so wicked as even to wish to see him again," said poor Vera, weeping; "but, oh, you don't know them as I do. I know it is not so, and that even now—"

"What now?" asked Madame coldly. "How can you know anything about him now; unless, indeed," and she turned a sudden, penetrating glance on her daughter's tear-stained face, "he has been in this neighbourhood or writing to you since we sent him away in September."

For a moment—one moment—the impulse came on Vera to throw herself on her mother's mercy and confess. And surely if her mother saw her lover's own words, words so brave, so loving and tender, she would believe in him more than she did now. But, on the other hand, the sternness of Madame's expression frightened her; and, if the effect of confession was only to be that of angering her parents more, and making them take measures to stop her from ever again communicating with Marstland or Leah, what should she do? Now, especially, when she must—yes, at all costs she must satisfy this cruel doubt which had been put into her mind? She burst out crying and answered, "No!" and then tried to comfort herself between her sobs by remembering that it was true after all. He had not been in the neighbourhood, nor had they corresponded—since September!

Madame St. Laurent, however, accepted the negative easily enough. In truth she kept a close watch on the post-bag, and was too well aware that her daughter had no correspondents, and never went near town or post office except in her company, to expect any other answer. She thought she had been too hard on the girl, and even stroked her hair saying, "Well, well, there is no need to cry about it," in such a much gentler tone, that Vera was encouraged to do what she had never in her life done before, seize her mother's hand and kiss it as she exclaimed:

"Oh, mamma, I am so unhappy. Don't make me more so. Don't ask me to marry the Count, and I will love you so. I will be so good. I will never do anything more to vex you."

But Madame drew her hand away. She had to do so with a force that savoured of harshness, because Vera held it so tightly, and because the girl's appeal, touching as it did the deepest feeling in her heart—that silent, jealous craving after her daughter's whole love and devotion which her own coldness balked of its fulfilment—required extra resolution to rebuff. And yet it must be rebuffed and her distasteful duty persisted in. She had promised that Vera should marry this man, and there was no going back for her. Loosing herself, therefore, from the clinging fingers, she proceeded to point out, as strongly as she could, the sinfulness and presumption of a young girl setting up her own judgment against her parents' in a matter of such

importance; the happiness which she ought to feel at having her married home within easy reach of her childhood's one, and of the mother she professed to love; the high position and solid merits of the Count, and especially the fact that this was no sudden fancy with him, but an affection beginning six years previously and persisted faithfully in ever since.

"Six years, mamma!" Vera exclaimed, rather in a tone of horror than otherwise, "When I was only fourteen! He told you then? And—and I have never known!"

"My dear, you do shock me. As if it was nice for a little girl to discuss such matters, or have love-nonsense put into her head! But at present, when the time has come for you to know it, I hope you see how ungrateful and wicked it would be to throw this gentleman over now without rhyme or reason, especially when he has been so kind to papa all these years, helping him and—yes, I may as well tell you—lending him money to an extent which it would be impossible for us to repay, supposing you were heartless enough to make it needful for us to do so."

Vera was silent, the tears running down her face. Oddly enough her indifference towards the Count had become changed into something very like active dislike on learning for how long he had, as it were, held her an unconscious and involuntary prisoner in his net. Yet, on the other hand, if this that her mother said about Leah and Marstland was true, she could never marry the latter; and in that case she cared little what else became of her. Only was it true? She must find that out first.

Madame St. Laurent rose, pressing one hand on the girl's shoulder.

"You are beginning to reflect, Vera," she said, "and I am glad of it, for I shall not say anything more. Remember, you are not required to fall in love with the Count at once. He does not even ask to marry you for another six months; and who knows what may happen in that time! Your feelings to him might be quite changed, or he might be—" "dead," Madame was going to say, but checked herself abruptly, and added instead, "he might be changed too. You are not even called on to say anything—yet; only to pacify your father by receiving his friend nicely when he comes here, and doing your best to return his affection for you."

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